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ABSTRACT

This special issue of the "Indiana English Journal" is devoted exclusively to the writing of Jesse Stuart. Two of his poems, "John and Ephesus" and "Synthetic Heroes," are included, as well as an interview with Stuart in which his life history, his views on writing in general, and his views on his own writing in particular are discussed. The final section of this issue is an essay by Stuart entitled "In Defense of Regionalism" in which he discusses the concept and the benefits of writing about a specific region. (TS)

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IN THIS ISSUE

JESSE STUART, a nationally known regional writer, makes his home in W-Hollow, Greenup, Kentucky.

J. R. LeMaster, Chairman of the Department of English, Defiance College, Defiance, Ohio, is currently working on the *Collected Poems of Jesse Stuart.*

LOUIS BAILEY, Greenup, Kentucky, took the photograph of Jesse Stuart for the front cover.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

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EDITOR
Charles D. Blaney, Department of English and Journalism, Indiana State University

JESSE STUART

JOHN AND EPHESUS

Saint John we can't forget your grave in Ephesus
For we were here when your dust was still in the tomb,
Naomi, my wife, world traveller, always with me,
Lover of Ancient Cities, ruins and antiques.
Told by the guide on our first visit to Ephesus
Your head was severed and was buried elsewhere.
You had to be important in your day and time
To have received such recognition after death,
You, Saint John, disciple of God and Jesus Christ,
A citizen once of the beautiful Patmos,
Where you wrote Revelations, the most discussed,
And hardest to understand book in our Bible.
Now, we've returned to Ephesus our favorite
Non-existing city, place of drybones
Where a disturbed wind constantly hums ditties
Along the Great White Way, the street where ancients walked,
Dramatists and poets, including Saint Paul and you.
Would not we now, two thousand years and flying oceans
Have liked, Saint John, to have seen you in this city
Walking along the Great White Way with guest, Saint Paul!

Later your tomb was opened and, maybe, your dust,
Reports say pieces of bone as well, were taken to Rome
Why take your dust to Rome? Why not leave your dust in
Your tomb, so near your church in native Ephesus.
You had a beautiful tomb where we are standing now,
Where thousands come, fellow Christians, Moslems, Jews.
Two summers past we stood here near your dust in the tomb
With new guide now, a Turkish lady with black eyes
Explained your tomb contained not your immortal dust,
She could have been Moslem, or, maybe, she was Christian,
Christian or Moslem she was interested in Saint John!
Saint John, you are one of the Moslem Prophets now,
Moslems they are akin to Jews whom they so hate
And Christians are so tied to Jews in their great faiths,
All worship the same God, three great religious faiths
And yet these people should not be so far apart.

Something about your Ephesus is empty, Saint John
Perhaps, because your hallowed dust has gone from here
And empty is your tomb where people come and stand,
So what stirs in their minds is anybody's guess!

Buried in faraway Ephesus, coastal city,
Bemoaned by these incessant Mediterranean winds
Maybe, they blew from Patmos where you dreamed, Saint John,
Where you wrote for the billions in the future world.
At Ephesus' Greek Theatre along the Great White Way
Many a time you sat on one of these stone seats,
You sat on one of these stone seats I've seen today,
Seeing the Great Greek Dramas with your close companions,
Maybe, with Paul, perhaps with Mark and Luke around you,
Birds of the early Christian feather flocked together,
Perhaps, the Dramatist, after the play came back to greet you,
Remember there were stirring times back in your days
In your great city where two million Ephesians lived.
I would have liked to have walked on your Great White Way
With you and your companions, heard your conversation
And to have heard wind here two thousand years ago
Over Ephesian homes and up their peopled streets.
I think as I hear these winds blowing strong today,
Maybe, your conversations are lost upon these winds,
Words spoken on the crystal air in your great city.

Saint John there are nostalgic winds in broken bones
Where this great city of the world once used to be
In Asia Minor where Christianity once thrived.
Saint John, why did we come here, why do we return?
I read your Revelations when I was a boy;
I read your Revelations when I was a man,
This prophecy of God and did not understand,
I read Ephesians too and here is Ephesus.

And here in Ephesus lived Christians and the Jews,
The Moslems were not born and Jewish faith was o'd,
And Christianity was in its first beginnings
Among the bones of Ephesus the Christians grew
Saint John you've had and you still have over the world,
Billions of followers, billions of faithful readers,
And writers of this world, Saint John, will envy you
In your inspired portrayal of the word of God.
No wonder people from this earth are here today,
People of many tongues from places far away,
They come to Ephesus to see uncovered bones,
They came to your church, theatre and Great White Way
And to the Old Agora strewn with fields of boulders,
These many stones were neatly hewn by human hands.

Saint John you've walked the streets in Ephesus' agora,
There purchased food and clothes, items to sustain life.
The Jews were merchants then in Ephesus as they
Are now in largest cities scattered over earth.
A few things do not change with centuries of time.

Ah what a place was ancient Ephesus, it's harbor
With ships from over all the known world sailing here
Into this harbor, trade ancient Ephesians knew.
Now, merchants, Jew, Gentile and Christian dreamers gone,
All have gone back to dust except stone walls and streets,
These are remains enough to show what once was here.

A century hence all Ephesus will be uncovered,
In flatland by the harbor, high upon the hill;
And in the century to come one thing is certain
There will be world visitors around your empty tomb,
And the wind,
the wind,
the lonesome,
the Ephesian Wind,
Will blow loudly,
sadly,
sweetly,
strongly,
never weakly

On Ephesus this great world city's last remains,
Crying for something lost that will not come again.
You helped to bring us here Saint John, maybe, this wind
Is whispering something to invisibles near us,
Speaking to little groups around your empty tomb
Where we are speaking Spanish, Greek, English, Turkish,
Our words are being carried away and mixed by wind.
This wind is good at mixing words in Ephesus.
Goodby, apostle John, goodby for now to you
And Ephesus but not goodby forever.

J. R. LeMASTER

JESSE STUART: AN INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Stuart, it is good to be here in W-Hollow. I want to ask you some questions; so let's begin with something about where the Stuarts came from.

STUART: The Stuarts came from Scotland. My ancestors came to Virginia in 1740. They spread through the Midwest. Some went out to California. A few went down South. Mostly, they came this way—down the Big Sandy River. They were farmers and soldiers. The Stuarts were very good soldiers, and when they came into the Big Sandy area they got entangled in clan warfare. Many of them were killed in clan wars, but some left and went over to Ohio. My grandfather settled not far from what is now W-Hollow. He didn't like it. My father was the only Stuart who remained. He married my mother, a Hilton, and they settled here in W-Hollow. I was born within a mile of where I live now. There have been five generations of us in this valley, counting the grandchildren.

INTERVIEWER: Before we continue--W-Hollow—I am sure many people know about it, but there are also many who do not. Where is it? Are you placing us in Appalachia?

STUART: We are considered to be in Appalachia. This is Greenup County—the fastest growing county in Appalachia--and we are about three miles (five by road) from the little town of Greenup, which has a population of 1500. It is not the largest town in the county, but we are centrally located.

INTERVIEWER: What is the county particularly noted for? Other than for Jesse Stuart?

STUART: The upper end of the county, next to Boyd County, is getting a lot of industry. The western part of the county is also getting a lot of industry, but it is primarily known for its white burley tobacco. It used to be great watermelon country, in the early days. There are many little farms throughout the county, and this is a great area for stories.

INTERVIEWER: You likely worked in tobacco when you were a small boy. Did you?

STUART: I certainly did. I know tobacco. We raised it, although we were not as good at it as some of the other farmers were. We were good at raising corn, and we were good gardeners. We took great pride in being soil conservationists. We took good care of the land.

INTERVIEWER: You have written a considerable bulk of material about this land—about W-Hollow and the surrounding area. How many books?

STUART: According to my bibliographer, I have done 40 books.

*Taped at W-Hollow, Kentucky, May 31, 1971.

INTERVIEWER: That's quite a number. How many short stories?

STUART: I have published 420 in good publications. Some have been published many times—one more than 100—but I am not counting reprints.

INTERVIEWER: The books, I believe, have come out of McGraw-Hill, Putnam, Scribners, etc.

STUART: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: What is there in W-Hollow in particular and Appalachia in general that warrants all of this literature?

STUART: When I was at Vanderbilt University, I was undecided about a direction. I was watching the modern poets of my time—such people as Frost, Masters, and Sandburg. I wrote some imitative poems at Vanderbilt, and I wrote some about my own country. I took them to a great teacher that I had, Donald Davidson. I asked him which way I should go. He looked them over and advised me to come back to my area. He told me to write about Appalachia, to write of my country as the Irish had written of Ireland, as the Scots had written of Scotland, as the Danes had written of Denmark, and as the Swedes and the Norwegians had written of the Scandinavian countries. My poems about Appalachia, Davidson said, were the real things.

INTERVIEWER: Will you say a little more about Vanderbilt? About the experience there?

STUART: I went there in the heart of the Great Depression. I had $130, and it took at least $1500 to pay my way for a year. I had a difficult time getting through. I worked as a janitor and lived on 11 meals per week. When Wesley Hall burned, the cafeteria went with it; so someone bought me a meal a day in order for me to finish the second semester. I did well in Donald Davidson's class, but I didn't measure up very well in Dr. Edwin Mims's Victorian Literature. I did well under Donald Wade in the second semester of American Literature. Overall, I wasn't rated very well at first, but I was before the year ended. Dr. Mims asked for a term paper that was not to exceed 18 pages, and we had 11 days to do one in. Living on a meal a day, I never cut a class. And when the 11 days were up, I had 322 pages—from margin to margin. A woman gave me the paper, and I gave a man 75 cents for the use of his typewriter. I typed the paper but Dr. Mims wasn't very happy to get it because he was a man who would read, and he did. Later I published 399 pages. It was a new Vanderbilt for me after Dr. Mims read that paper.

INTERVIEWER: I believe that your paper later was published as a book—*Beyond Dark Hills?*

STUART: That's right. It was published nearly seven years after I wrote it. I wrote it when I was 23 or 24. Immediately after I wrote it I went on a writing spree.

INTERVIEWER: What did it?

STUART: Donald Davidson.

INTERVIEWER: The men who were at Vanderbilt?

STUART: I was stirred by these men, even by the men under whom I couldn't do well. I got more out of their classes than some of the people who made good grades.

INTERVIEWER: Were you there when the Fugitives were strong?

STUART: Right. That's when they were very strong. I had Warren in the novel, and everybody in the class was going to write a novel. I think I am the only one from that class who ever wrote one. I have written eight or ten now.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any very intimate contacts with the Fugitives? Did you work with them or do anything outside the classroom?

STUART: I tried to work with Warren outside the classroom. He was a very busy young man—two or three years older than I—but I was a student. He was invited over to Nashville, and I wasn't. I was pretty close to Donald Davidson and Dr. Mims. I think Dr. Mims was father to the Fugitives. Other people may dispute this, but I think so. He was a great teacher and a great leader. He was one of the great liberals of the South.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Mims was father to the Fugitives? I am sure that nothing in print would verify that. Will you expand?

STUART: Dr. Mims taught them all, although I am not sure about Ransom. He taught Robert Penn Warren. Warren, although he was teaching, was still Dr. Mims's student. Dr. Mims called him "Red," and he would say "Red, you get those grades in on time." Listen, he ran that place. That is, he ran the English Department.

INTERVIEWER: You and Warren have a number of things in common: (1) You're both from Kentucky; (2) you were both at Vanderbilt and studied under Dr. Mims; and (3) Dr. Mims likely had a profound influence on the directions in which both of you developed.

STUART: I think he had a great influence on everybody who ever went through that English Department—while he was there.

INTERVIEWER: He was apparently a well-loved man.

STUART: And he was also the greatest speaker I ever heard.

INTERVIEWER: Let's change directions. You have written some 40 or more books about W-Hollow and the Appalachian area. Donald Davidson told you to, and you have been writing for 40 years. Is that right?

STUART: Forty-one years.

INTERVIEWER: And you are still writing. Last night I looked through the manuscript for a new novel. When are you going to retire?

STUART: No retirement. I can't. Even if I did, I would continue to publish. For each decade of my career I have written one or two book manuscripts that are still on the shelf. I can pull out a book at any time for a publisher.

INTERVIEWER: You've published about one per year. Does that mean that you write one per year?

STUART: I average writing a book a year. This year I hope to complete two novels. One is done, and I want to do another. I am not writing poems, but I have four novels that I want to complete before something happens to me. It's in me—the urge to write—and I am going to write the four.

INTERVIEWER: According to your early autobiography—*Beyond Dark Hills*—there are a number of early but profound influences on your life, and your writing. There is Robert Burns, for example.

STUART: He was the first. There was also Ralph Waldo Emerson—and Dickens. He was a great novelist.

INTERVIEWER: Will you elaborate on the influence from Burns?

STUART: Before I went to Greenup High School, I had only 22 months of Plum Grove schooling. I had to take an examination to get in at Greenup.

INTERVIEWER: Plum Grove School—that was a small . . .

STUART: That was a one-room school where one teacher taught grades one through eight. Anyway, Greenup High School was a great place. I had a great English teacher, Mrs. R. E. Hattan, who was a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. She also had a major in English, and she could really teach it. I loved her because she turned me loose to write themes. That's where I started. She was a great influence.

INTERVIEWER: Was she the one who introduced you to Robert Burns?

STUART: She introduced Burns's poetry. She was Scottish—a McFarland—and she had grown up on Burns. She gave me Burns's poetry, and it set me on fire. Even though Burns lived from 1759 to 1796, he was so real to me that he walked beside me. His poems fit into my area—Appalachia. Also, I look back now and wonder about Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was a deep thinker—a deep man—and I think his essay on nature has helped me considerably.

INTERVIEWER: How about his essay on the poet?

STUART: I loved that. I read everything by Emerson that I could get. By the way, I cared less for the New England group, although the Concord poets influenced me: Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau.

INTERVIEWER: Is it that there might have been some similarities between New England countryside and W-Hollow countryside?

STUART: I think you have it. When I went to New York the first time, I didn't stay long. I went on as fast as I could to Concord. I wanted to see the graves of these people, and see where they had lived. I went on to Maine to see the birthplace of Longfellow, although I never cared very much for his poetry. I thought he was more for children. He used to be one of the big poets.

INTERVIEWER: As you developed, you wrote a lot of poetry. However, you are primarily known for your fiction. What has happened? What has happened to the early influences? Can you explain?

STUART: You know, I have read about three books of poetry for every novel that I have read. I haven't been a reader of fiction. I haven't had the time, I have had to make a living—farm, teach, lecture, travel, and write.

INTERVIEWER: How do you do it?

STUART: Balance. Before I almost died of a heart attack, I used to plow the soil—work on the land. I would come in and write at night. I would get stirred up. Often I wrote poems in the cornfield, and on the plow. While traveling for lectures, I can't just sit. I have actually written short stories on planes and trains. When I get a little time, I sit down for the long haul—the long book. That is, I sit down to write a novel. The longest it ever has taken me to write the first draft of a novel, if I remember correctly, is from August 8 to October 22. That was *Trees of Heaven*, which turned out to be 342 pages.

INTERVIEWER: Three months to write a novel?

STUART: That is about it. I started on this last novel while I was on a cruise. I went to rest, but I couldn't. I started writing in March and one week ago I finished—in May. I now have it half revised. That's the way I write a novel. I get on what I call a binge.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say that it gushes?

STUART: Yes, and I get furious when anyone or anything gets in my way.

INTERVIEWER: Do you believe, then, in a thing that we sometimes refer to as inspiration? Is there an overwhelming compulsion?

STUART: There is with me. I don't know about other people. When I get started, I can no more help my condition or mood than I can control the shape of my hand—or my head.

INTERVIEWER: Something carries you—rather than your carrying or controlling it?

STUART: And it's mine.

INTERVIEWER: Now that we are talking about fiction—of the characters that you have created in your novels and stories, which ones stand out more? Are closer to you?

STUART: I have many of them. If these characters could all come back to my funeral someday, they would fill a hillside. But they won't all be there. Some are mythical and imaginary, although a lot of them are real people whom I have disguised. That is, after all, where a writer gets his real characters—his convincing characters.

INTERVIEWER: Is Shan Powderjay really Jesse Stuart?

STUART: Some people say that he is. The same people say that Fen Powderjay is my brother James. I don't know but that creating characters in fiction is something like having children.

INTERVIEWER: Do I understand correctly—that the source lies somewhere in real people whom you know?

STUART: There is going to be an author out there in the cemetery. I am going to have my characters all around me.

INTERVIEWER: Are many of them already there?

STUART: Yes, but people don't know, by and large, who they are. I am afraid to tell, presently.

INTERVIEWER: And you have disguised them?

STUART: I have, but they include such people as my cousins, my parents, and my grandfather. One of my first stories was about my grandfather.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk about the novel some more. Have you ever been made aware of the ways in which you resemble Faulkner? Some of the things Faulkner has said about his own writing sound much like the same things that you have said about yours. You are aware, of course, that your W-Hollow milieu is much like Faulkner's mythical county down in Mississippi. Also, Faulkner apparently studied and was impressed by a number of Roman writers: Cicero, Seneca, and others. He was an unusually moral man—with a moral vision. There was, it seems, a particular kind of man or quality of manliness that he found in his reading of the Romans. He sometimes referred to it as consisting of the old truths—"the verities." Do you consider your writing to be moral instruction for the reader?

STUART: It certainly is. Faulkner was influenced by the Romans However, Faulkner and I have both been influenced by French writers too. If you don't mind, I want to digress.

INTERVIEWER: Go ahead.

STUART: When I was a student at Greenup High School, I read a man named Maupassant. He wrote a short story that was plotless, but it had a colorful slice of life, and when you read one of them you couldn't forget it. Now, the stories that we read in high school were mostly Poe's and O. Henry's. They were the great stories at that time.

INTERVIEWER: You got the slice-of-life technique for your short stories from Maupassant?

STUART: I went back to the French. I never stopped writing those plotless stories once I got started. Even when I was at Fort Knox, I wrote in the barracks. However, when I went to Lincoln Memorial University, I found a man of destiny. That was before I went to Vanderbilt. I found a man who was of German descent—pure German. His name was Harry Harrison Kroll, and he came from Indiana. He was one of the most emotional men I ever knew, and one of the most brilliant. He was writing at Lincoln Memorial, and he was teaching creative writing. He would cut class to go to a baseball game though; so he eventually got fired. Under him I did more writing than I did under any other teacher. He believed in the O. Henry theory or method of writing the short story, and wrote that kind accordingly. I would say, "Mr. Kroll, I don't like them." And he would say, "I don't like what you are doing either. You don't tie your stories up." Forty-three of the pieces that I wrote while at Lincoln Memorial were later published in *Esquire, North American Review*, and other magazines.

INTERVIEWER: So, in spite of Mr. Kroll you continued writing your slice-of-life stories? More of Maupassant than anyone else?

STUART: That's right, and Mr. Kroll was one of the finest teachers I ever had. He was another man who stirred me.

INTERVIEWER: Let's return to when you were a boy growing up in and around what is now W-Hollow. I believe that your mother and your father both had profound influences upon how you turned out.

STUART: They did. My father was Scottish. He came out of the clans. He was a great family man. He looked after his children. I have never seen a man like him. He never corrected but one of us—my brother—and he cried after he did it. My mother was different. She was English. She made us toe the line. But we were a "strong-knit" family. We had nothing—poorest of all families in this area. My father couldn't read or write. He was a coal miner. My mother had a second-grade education. We rented these little farms. You have seen them. I don't know how we ever made a living, but we did. We worked. We picked berries, and we paid rent. My father would always say to us that a school teacher—not a writer—was the greatest person in the world because he taught doctors, lawyers, and everybody. My dad said that teaching was the beginning, and that that is where it all came from. "You are the best children in the world," my mother would tell us. And we believed it. She would do that, and every day my dad would say, "You will amount to something. You will amount to something." I can still hear that sometimes when I wake

up in the mornings: "You will amount to something. You will amount to something." We could never get away from it. We all finished college, and we have taught a combined total of 116 years. Our children have taught a combined total of 186 years.

INTERVIEWER: Quite a record for one family.

STUART: And people know me primarily as a writer.

INTERVIEWER: But some people know you as a man who has pushed legislation for better schools in the state of Kentucky.

STUART: Few writers in America have ever fought for schools the way I have. I have barnstormed the U.S. in every state except five for better schools.

INTERVIEWER: You feel that you haven't been "just" a writer for all of these years?

STUART: I haven't. I have written books on education that are going to be around long after I am gone. *The Thread That Runs So True*, for example, has covered one fourth of the world. It's helping education in other countries.

INTERVIEWER: That's fine, but how long has it been since you wrote any poetry?

STUART: About two years. I got on a binge of writing sarcastic poems about people. I called them my Bird Poems because it all came out of President Johnson and his family. I never have let that Bird volume get out. I call it the *Golden Age of Birdland*. You remember the Golden Age of Greece. I also want my *Collected Poems* published, but I actually don't have a publisher for them.

INTERVIEWER: I believe that you have published five volumes of poems—if we include your juvenilia. When you came back from Vanderbilt, you were a poet, and in a very short time you turned out the mammoth *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*. I recall that you spent about 11 months on it. How many sonnets are there in the collection?

STUART: Seven hundred and three.

INTERVIEWER: There is nothing in *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* that would indicate a movement toward satire. Also, why the sonnet form in the first place? It never really seemed to catch on in this country.

STUART: In high school I studied the Shakespearean sonnet, the Italian sonnet, and the Spenserian sonnet. Anyway, at Vanderbilt I had a man whom I didn't like tell me that the sonnet wasn't any good as a form. I said, "Why can't I make it good as a form?" So, I just turned loose. I started *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* after I finished my paper for Dr. Mims.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get started? Did you start with an idea? Did you start with seeing something? How does a poem get started?

STUART: Let me tell you something that I have never told anyone before. *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*, as you know, was done in four parts. That is, it's seasonal. I got an old recording of a man who just recently died. It was called "The Right of Spring," and the man was Igor Stravinsky. He was a White Russian, one of the greatest creative men of our time. I got that record and I played it over and over—feeling the surge of the seasons. I captured the idea of avalanche from that music. If I had known the man was living, I would have gone to California to visit him. But I didn't know. Other poets flocked to him.

INTERVIEWER: How about starting the individual poem? Rather than accounting for the collection, can you explain how one starts a poem?

STUART: That is hard to say. I got the urge, and then there was Stravinsky's music. I played that record over and over in a little bunkhouse out back. I would make a pot of coffee and play that music. I would write because I was emotionally carried away.

INTERVIEWER: You were inspired by Stravinsky, but you have had at least a speaking relationship with a number of writers: Masters, Frost, Sandburg, Wolfe, and any number of other people. In the first place, what was it about these men that particularly impressed you?

STUART: I met them by accident. I always wanted to meet Carl Sandburg, but I could never bring myself to meet a writer. I could meet farmers.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying, like Faulkner, "I don't really know any literary people. I'm a farmer. That is the way I make my living, so I don't worry much about writers and critics. I am a farmer who just happens to be a writer, and that is the way I like it."

STUART: I have to go part of the way with Faulkner. All the writers I have met I did so by accident. I never particularly sought one out. I met Tom Wolfe on Fifth Avenue. I went up to him and called him Mr. Wolfe. He said, "You're from the South." And I said, "I'm Jesse Stuart." He said, "I have just read your *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*, and it's a great book." He quoted from the death section.

INTERVIEWER: "Preface for After Death"?

STUART: That's right. He quoted three or four of those poems to me there on Fifth Avenue. He also gave me a copy of his *From Death to Morning*, and autographed it. I never tried to follow up with a letter or anything, but I ran into Tom three or four times. I was published by Scribners and went to those Scribner parties. Tom would be there. He was their big man then.

INTERVIEWER: How about the others?

STUART: I wanted to see Frost, and I met him at Bread Loaf. I spoke there—was on the program. I was scared to death of his being in the audience. I got to meet Sandburg when I was in the navy at Great Lakes. We spoke from the same platform in Chicago, and I believe we raised something like three million dollars in one evening—war bonds. That was when I met Sandburg the first time. Then there was Masters.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet him?

STUART: I was staying at the YMCA in New York—just across from the old Chelsea Hotel. A man told me that there was a writer over there, and that his name was Edgar Lee Masters. We got along fine together. I really liked him. He was an old man at the time, and he liked me.

INTERVIEWER: I believe you talked with him about your having been recently married.

STUART: Secretly married. And he said to me, "Son, it might work. It might work." He had been married twice and wasn't living with either of his wives. I will never forget his saying, "It might work. It might work." When he met my wife, Naomi Deane, he liked her. And she liked him. We were crazy about him.

INTERVIEWER: He was abused at times about his *Spoon River Anthology*, and of course you have sometimes been accused of borrowing his overall structure, technique, etc.

STUART: But I didn't do it. I mentioned it to him, and he said, "Just go on and write. Stay with one wife, if you can. Stay with your wife and stay on the farm, if you can. Stay away from this place, and don't pay any attention to the critics. They are all a bunch of liars." I have often wondered why he hadn't stayed in his wonderful Midwest.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get to know any of the other "musical" writers? Lindsay, for example?

STUART: I didn't. I wanted to meet him. Masters loved him. I missed him, even when he was speaking nearby in Portsmouth, Ohio. I'll tell you though that we had some good women writers about then. Sara Teasdale and Edna St. Vincent Millay could really write. I mentioned Sara Teasdale at times, and people would laugh. But they have certainly been recognized since.

INTERVIEWER: Why are you relating the women writers to Vachel Lindsay?

STUART: Well, Vachel Lindsay, as you may know, was secretly in love with Sara Teasdale, and she with him.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

STUART: She would say to Vachel, "Take that line out." Vachel wouldn't even read. He would just look at her and cross it out. I got this from Masters. He said, "If she had kept on, I think she would have ruined a good poet." Masters didn't particularly like Sara Teasdale.

INTERVIEWER: Is it true that Vachel Lindsay and Sara Teasdale finally ended it all in a suicide pact?

STUART: I don't know if it was a pact or not, but when I asked Masters about Lindsay he said, "Son, he suicided." That was Masters' expression. Of course, they both committed suicide.

INTERVIEWER: Although you have known a lot of writers, you have stayed away from schools, movements, cliques, and groups. Why? Are you afraid of being corrupted?

STUART: I don't like them. I wouldn't join one at all. I have to be myself. I think every writer has to be himself. Here's somebody who says a poem is right, or that it has to be done in a particular way. That's not true. It doesn't have to be done in any one way. It can be done in other ways. Back in the Twenties I learned my lesson. You had to be an Imagist poet to get published. In other words, you had to put a picture in every sentence. Some of them had the good sense to get out in time. John Gould Fletcher was one. I don't think Amy Lowell ever got out. But those people were practically wiped out. And now look. What has happened to all of the Imagist poetry of the Twenties? What is going to happen to the faddish poetry that is being written now? I am not a prophet. It is hard enough to be a poet and make a living. But fads don't stay around long. There might be one or two good poems that will in time stand on their own merit.

INTERVIEWER: What you are saying is that although fads come and go poetry is ever with us.

STUART: You've said it. Can you imagine Wordsworth being faddish?

INTERVIEWER: You seem to identify yourself with older writers. Are there any of your contemporaries with whom you really identify? Are there any with whom you have shared ideas? Any that you feel may have influenced you?

STUART: No. I have not shared ideas, but I respect some of them, even E. E. Cummings and his kind of poetry.

INTERVIEWER: Then you don't feel that there has been much of an interchange, if any at all, between you and Warren? No particular interchange between you and Tate when you knew him?

STUART: There has been none. Tate lost one of the finest poems I ever wrote. I sent it to him and never got it back. I didn't keep a copy. That taught me a lesson.

INTERVIEWER: You do keep copies?

STUART: I do now—after my incident with Tate. I had Warren look over poems that I was writing for *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*. He complimented me on them when he was at Vanderbilt, but there has been no exchange since. I have had a few letters from him, but only a few. On the other hand, Donald Davidson and I kept a correspondence going. We had exchange.

INTERVIEWER: How much Walt Whitman did you read when you were young? Vanderbilt and before?

STUART: I had two sprees on Walt Whitman. I got into Walt Whitman in high school. I thought he was great. Then I got away from him, and I don't know why. After Vanderbilt, I got back to Whitman.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

STUART: I don't know. I reassessed him.

INTERVIEWER: I have pointed out recently that I can see Walt Whitman throughout your work. Is he obviously there? Has enough of Walt Whitman taken residence within you that . . .

STUART: That's it. Walt Whitman did something to me. As you say, he took residence within me. I have never imitated him. Walt Whitman was a great poet. His grass covered the world. I think that perhaps my land might someday cover the world. It's embedded in me. It's soaked in me. Everything is the land. The land is part of me, and I have written my poems about that. The land that you see in this valley fed me from the time I was born until I was a man with great strength. I ate the food that was raised on this land.

INTERVIEWER: Then you are not writing merely about W-Hollow or Appalachia? Do you, in effect, feel that you are writing for a larger audience? The entire country? The world?

STUART: I certainly am. It's international.

INTERVIEWER: You are frequently called a regionalist. Do you think that the whole idea of regionalism may be a farce?

STUART: It hurts you, whatever it is.

INTERVIEWER: On the other hand, assuming that a writer must begin with an object or objects, don't all things have to be located in a particular place at a particular time? Your objects happen to be located in and around W-Hollow.

STUART: Let me explain. Even the novel *Taps for Private Tussie* has a universal subject. In it somebody wants something for nothing, and that happens all over the world. When I wrote that book I thought all great give-away programs would be over by now. They are not, and that is why the book has remained popular. Fathers are universal subjects, as in *God's Oddling.* Snakes are universal.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that there are some common universal symbols?

STUART: Yes, but the common symbols do not include the triangular marriage—boy meets girl—the popular model for so many of our novels. In Egypt, for example, marriages are made. Also in parts of Africa and the Near East.

INTERVIEWER: American novelists have followed the pattern of triangular marriage?

STUART: Many of the early ones. I haven't, except perhaps for *Daughter of the Legend.* The theme of that is not so much rivalry as what happens afterward because of race.

INTERVIEWER: *Taps for Private Tussie*—do you consider that the best novel that you have written?

STUART: Some people think it is, but I don't. The critics think *Trees of Heaven* is put together better than any of the other novels, and that's the first novel I did.

INTERVIEWER: *Trees of Heaven* certainly demonstrates your being an early and good poet. However, I have just been reading from the dust jacket of your new collection of stories that, according to a *New York Times* review, all of your stories have poetry in them. I agree. The early effort in poetry is likely the thing that makes your fiction lyrically superior.

STUART: I don't know. I read a lot of poetry, and poetry is my first love. I was under the influence of Burns there in high school, but prose started then too. One of the poems I did in high school made the *Yale Review.*

INTERVIEWER: Do you agree that the person who wants to become a good fiction writer should become a poet first?

STUART: I would say so. It wouldn't hurt him. I will say that. It would be very good training. Faulkner tried poetry. Hemingway tried it. I have read some of Faulkner's poems, and they are not bad.

INTERVIEWER: Become a poet first?

STUART: It wouldn't hurt at all.

INTERVIEWER: Recently, I picked up a volume of essays that writers have written about writing. I read your advice about writing to please oneself. How do you justify that? Considering the demands of publishers, and the demands of readers, how do you justify writing for oneself?

STUART: If you only knew how many people have approached me and asked me to write a book on something that they want. To me, such a thing is hack writing. I won't fool with that at all. I have to write my own ideas about what I want, and about what I like. Frequently, someone wants me to do something for them—write something for them or do a

foreword—and it is this kind of thing that is non-writing. That happens every week—perhaps twice a week.

INTERVIEWER: Mechanical writing?

STUART: I suppose. I have a number of such requests lying there on the floor now.

INTERVIEWER: You say that you write what you want. Isn't it true that you can't write anything else? Because experience is both personal and cumulative, you have to write out of your own experience. You can't write from the experience of anyone else. Don't you agree?

STUART: That's right. It's the dream a man has. It's the dream.

INTERVIEWER: May I interrupt? More specifically, it's simply that every man has his own singular vision, the way he looks at the world. Also, beyond the way he looks at the world is the way in which he actually sees it. Perhaps he even creates it in what he sees, or creates what he sees through the act of seeing it—sees it into being. That is, he sees the world in himself, or at least in terms of himself. It is a reflection of his own eye. A number of impressions built up over a number of years, and all of these impressions—in some kind of relationship to each other—determine how one looks at the world when he goes out the door in the morning.

STUART: You're right. Writers are personalities—word personalities. When you think of Chaucer, you think of England and the *Canterbury Tales*. You think of Shakespeare and Dickens in much the same way. You think of Emerson and his New England. You think of Sandburg and his Midwest. You think of Faulkner and his Mississippi. If writers follow their dreams, as these men did, they become not only hills in words, but they become mountains in words. They become big mountains—personalities.

INTERVIEWER: You are talking very much like Walt Whitman now—his idea of influx and efflux, or the idea of pulling the whole world into oneself.

STUART: That's what it amounts to.

INTERVIEWER: Or perhaps disintegrating oneself and becoming the whole world. I think that what you are saying—in the examples of Shakespeare, Faulkner, and the others—is that there is a kind of intimate courtship between a writer and his place.

STUART: You're right.

INTERVIEWER: And that because of that courtship—the depth of that intimacy—place is the only thing about which a writer can legitimately write.

STUART: He can write, let's say, better—legitimately better. If he does what other people would have him do, he is a hack writer. But, if someone suggests something which is a part of my dream that has escaped momentarily I will consider it. I don't mean to throw out everything.

INTERVIEWER: If it is part of your experience?

STUART: If it is part of the dream of experience.

INTERVIEWER: You persist in using that word "dream." What do you mean by that?

STUART: Oh, the dream is big. I consider the dream a universe. In our dreams, you see, begin our responsibilities.

INTERVIEWER: Are you referring to what Coleridge called imagination? Or are you referring to what we commonly call imagination?

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STUART: I don't know. What I have been saying is my own idea.

INTERVIEWER: But it sounded so much like

STUART: The idea is mine. I came to that conclusion a long time ago. I have it in writing somewhere—about the dream. It might be in *Source and Substance*, which isn't published yet, although it is about 1400 pages.

INTERVIEWER: It is also in "Hold to a Living Dream" as well as in other places. You have written a lot about the dream. The late Robert Hillyer had some ideas about the dream too.

STUART: That interests me very much. Robert Hillyer put my last book of poems together and he was fascinated by it. I have never read Hillyer very much, but I like what I have read.

INTERVIEWER: This peculiar stuff that you are talking about—dream-stuff—do you mean that all of reality is dream-stuff? Do you mean that the dream is beyond reality? Is it something in which the writer gets lost before he can write?

STUART: He can get lost beyond reality, but I think you have to dream before you can have reality.

INTERVIEWER: Dream is something that takes off from the object?

STUART: I will give you an example. I had been thinking this book that I have just written for three or four years. I had been "thinking" it. I had these characters projected out there somewhere. I couldn't write a line. Suddenly, while on a Caribbean cruise, it came to me. I grabbed a pen, went to a table, and started writing.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying that you dreamed your way through the book before you started writing it?

STUART: That's it.

INTERVIEWER: How vivid were the characters before you sat down to write?

STUART: As vivid as you are sitting there before me.

INTERVIEWER: In other words, you lived through the book?

STUART: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: At least, it was there in your mind. Would you say that you created it?

STUART: I said that it took me from late February until May 23 to write it. It actually took longer than that. It was already written by late February. All I did was put it on paper.

INTERVIEWER: And putting it on paper likely turned out to be the easier job. Was there much mental anguish in the three years before you sat down at the desk?

STUART: It worried me. Tiredness showed itself in the hand-writing. I left off "-ings," and I misspelled words all through the manuscript. I was going at a white-hot speed. The most that I remember doing in one day is 45 pages. That was in longhand.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting—about the "-ings." I understand that Thomas Wolfe, at least according to his biographer, had a habit of writing one or two syllables in place of a long word. He would draw a line for the remainder of the word. I understand that he threw the pages into a pile in the middle of the floor because he wrote so fast that he couldn't be bothered with stacking them.

STUART: If I sit down to write, I throw them onto the floor. I don't use a line, but I leave the "-ings" off. I always go back and fill in though.

INTERVIEWER: You put in part of a word and go on?

STUART: That's right. I misspell all of the time—that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Does that mean that the actual writing—literature, story, or whatever—is gushing in so fast that mechanically you can't keep up with it?

STUART: I don't think of it as mechanical. Usually, it falls into form mechanically as I write. I don't think of the mechanics.

INTERVIEWER: You are not conscious of writing as mechanical process or exercise?

STUART: I am not conscious of the mechanics. I am only conscious of getting whatever it is on paper—of recording it. If we go out and speak to somebody, the words are gone with the wind. They don't count.

INTERVIEWER: Let's get back to something more specific about process. Let's say that the story or the novel, over a period of years, has been written. You sit down at a desk and start putting it on paper. As you say, it comes fast while you are recording it. Apparently, you are not conscious of a word in a sentence, or even of where you begin and end sentences. Not even of where you begin and end paragraphs. These, I think, are all mechanical things. Do they seem to come automatically or unconsciously?

STUART: I am not conscious of them. I just record. I don't pay any attention to such things until later. Then I revise. When you do something creatively, you dream and record the dream. When you revise, you have a cold and mathematical mind—the kind I had when I used to teach algebra and plain geometry. Revising is something like using facts and figures. I like to see something come out right. You can't always get writing to come out right. It's the dream. The revision is the mathematical part.

INTERVIEWER: Calculating?

STUART: You correct the grammar. I get prepositional phrases connected to the wrong nouns. That's my weakness.

INTERVIEWER: I think you have been saying that unless the man has the story, unless he has lived it, experienced it, or whatever—or to put it into your terms, unless he has dreamed the dream—there is no point in his sitting down to a cold typewriter. Is that right?

STUART: I have never sat down when I had nothing to write.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that this thing that we have been referring to as dream is usual in other people? Do other people go through the same kind of thing—even though they don't record it?

STUART: I don't know. I can only speak for myself.

INTERVIEWER: I want to ask some more questions about your childhood. Did you do a lot of dreaming? Did you have a lot of wild dreams? Did you have visions?

STUART: I had visions. I had visions, for example, of owning this valley when my father and mother were renting here. I had to be between nine and 12, and we were hoeing corn. My father was plowing. Once, when he stopped the plow, I looked up and said, "Dad and Mom, one of these days I am going to own all of this valley. I am going to own every place

you have ever farmed." They laughed till they cried. My mother, by the way, didn't live to see me get the last farm, but I got it.

INTERVIEWER: You have to admit that it was childish exaggeration. It would appear so to them or to anybody else.

STUART: Let's go on. I read Robert Burns. I said that if Robert Burns could write poems that would endure for hundreds of years Jesse Stuart, whose people came from Scotland, could write poems of his Kentucky hills that would endure. I said that when I was very young. I also read Alexander the Great, and he flamed my mind. Why couldn't I lead armies? That was the kind of imagination I had.

INTERVIEWER: Considering what you are saying, do you think hero worship is a good thing for boys?

STUART: It is if he gets the right hero. You can bet that it is.

INTERVIEWER: Does what you call the right hero have a profound influence on developing the moral character of a boy?

STUART: I know that it does. I taught for a time in high school and I think it is fine when a student will imitate a good teacher—man or woman.

INTERVIEWER: Then you must believe that character is formed by way of models. Or is it a matter of chance?

STUART: Wait a minute. There is a difference. Models are fine, but sometimes a boy may not have that model and still develop character. He can learn the hard way and still develop character.

INTERVIEWER: I think you are still saying, by and large, that character is formed on models.

STUART: I think it is.

INTERVIEWER: Let's change directions. What about America for writers? In the first place, what about America as a source of experience out of which the writing gets done? Second, what about America as a market and a reading public? I ask these questions keeping in mind our current turmoil, chaos, and indecisiveness. There is a lack of direction. Certainly, there is a dwindling or dead sense of patriotism. America, it seems to me, has never been particularly proud of supporting or promoting its writers. The people who write are rebels. What does America have to offer a writer?

STUART: Filth and nothingness, for some time, have been the biggest sellers in America. Where is the American mind? With the best schools and teachers in the world, where is the American character?

INTERVIEWER: A number of people are saying that literature in America has declined—that the bulk of what is being printed for public consumption is filth. They are saying that no good novels are being published in America today. How do you account for this?

STUART: I think that there are some—a few good novelists. This is also true of poetry. I understand that in the U. S. there are six million people trying to write poems. There are 200 being published in Kentucky. But I have been with some of these writers. They don't sell many books.

INTERVIEWER: Poetry, of course, has never sold well in America. To sell 500 copies of a poetry book seems to be quite an accomplishment. I don't know what it means, but fiction has always sold better than poetry.

STUART: Let's go back to Walt Whitman again. He said that we had to have great audiences in order to have great poets.

INTERVIEWER: You are right, but Walt Whitman had the idea that he was doing something in his *Leaves of Grass* that would help bring about such an audience.

STUART: Do you know how many copies of that book sold when it came out?

INTERVIEWER: I have no idea.

STUART: Did you know that some people in Camden, New Jersey, threw them at him after they bought them? But that's America. America has treated me well because I have treated America well. Some people have snubbed me, but I don't care about that. They have their lives to live, and I have mine.

INTERVIEWER: From what you are saying I gather that you have faith in the future. Do you have faith in the literary future of America?

STUART: I do. I think we have enough fine boys and girls coming up through this thing to level us off and save us. I can never give up on America's young people. I simply can't. I have had too many good students who have done things. They come largely from the upper five per cent, but occasionally one climbs from the bottom. You can't speculate about who will make it. Let me digress. For example, the first man who ever called me a genius was Dr. Mims. Down at Lincoln Memorial, Mr. Kroll said of a girl that she was a genius, and that she would become a great writer. When he called her a genius, I was so hurt that I went to the library and looked up every definition for the word. Later, when I went to Vanderbilt and did that long paper for Dr. Mims, he looked at me and said, "Stuart, if you were my son I don't know what I would do with you. You've just a genius." When he said that, he gave me a grade—the best grade I ever got in my life. I don't care for that kind of thing now, but when I was young I did. Young people want that. When you cause a young person to believe in himself, he doesn't have to go for psychiatric treatment.

INTERVIEWER: And you think that older people, particularly those in influential places, can do much to instill confidence in the young?

STUART: It's desperately needed. It's especially needed in our colleges—and in our secondary schools.

INTERVIEWER: We are hearing much now about how education in America is deteriorating—breaking down.

STUART: I would like to see some of these students work. In America we have too much. Where they have to work and dig for anything, you'll get the best. May I continue this?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

STUART: Ed Kuhn is still a young man. He comes out of Cincinnati, Ohio. He was my editor at McGraw-Hill for twenty years. He says that the good writers in America today don't come through the schools. The good writers, like Hemingway and Faulkner, come through the school of hard knocks. I agree with him. Look at Sandburg—what he was—and Frost.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying that you believe in work? That if there is a way out of our present chaos it is through a sense of direction that comes from a great liking for work?

STUART: That's right. When I first taught school, some of my

students walked eight miles each way. They wanted to make life easier for their children, and they did. When I was called back to that school the students had everything. They were tearing up the place. These were the people who came out of the pioneer stock of America. It was out of that that I got my book *Mr. Gallion's School.*

INTERVIEWER: Did the parents eliminate the eight mile walk too fast? Something happened. Perhaps we haven't earned our affluence. At least, we don't seem to know how to handle it.

STUART: I believe you are right. When I was at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, students came in there from all over. The best students I have ever taught in college were there. They were largely Armenian, Moslem, and Greek. And they worked. Those Greeks were unbelievable. Many of them came from poor families in the islands, and it was a joy to teach them. I had 11 in class, and I believe that ten of the 11 now have Ph.D. degrees.

INTERVIEWER: Before we conclude, I would like to ask a few more questions about you and your writing. Your first novel, I believe you said, was *Trees of Heaven.*

STUART: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: How did you come about it. How did you do it? I understand that you were once told that you would never write a novel.

STUART: Mr. Kroll told me that at Lincoln Memorial. He also told me that I would never write a short story. In spite of that, he was one of the best friends I ever had. He was like an older brother. But you asked about the novel. I went to Europe on a Guggenheim fellowship. When I returned to this country, it had gotten into the newspapers that Jesse Stuart had come back with a manuscript for a novel. I hadn't started one, although I had been thinking about one—dreaming. On August 8, my birthday, I started writing. I worked a while at home, but everything went sour. I carried my typewriter and manuscript over the hill to Oscar Sammons' house. We had always been good friends. I stayed there and started writing again. One morning I got up and I said, "Ann, this coffee is terrible." Ann was Oscar's wife. Oscar tasted the coffee and said, "I can't see that it's terrible." I packed again, thanked them, and went to a little hotel in Greenup.

INTERVIEWER: What was wrong? Was it that you were trying desperately to write but weren't ready?

STUART: It was the pressure—an avalanche of it. The people at the hotel stopped me from working at night. They said I made too much noise. There was a new courthouse going up in Greenup, and court was held in a big dwelling—an old house. In one of the rooms the ceiling was falling. They were all afraid of it, so they let me have that room. I got under where the ceiling had already fallen. That way none of it could come down and hit me. And I finished the novel there.

INTERVIEWER: You finished it there?

STUART: Yes. I then got the manuscript ready, borrowed some money, and went to New York City. That's when I met Edgar Lee Masters. I didn't have any money when I got there, so when E. P. Dutton and Company advanced me $250 I was rich.

INTERVIEWER: How did you do it? Did it come as a series of stories?

STUART: It was already written in my head. It was like this last one.

INTERVIEWER: It simply came as experience? *Dream*?

STUART: It was all in the people I knew. I just put it together. Anse Bushman is in it, and the Tussies. The Tussies, of course, later went into *Taps for Private Tussie.*

INTERVIEWER: You have written essays, poems, stories, and novels. Have you ever written any plays?

STUART: They are very hard for me. I tried one, and I have forgotten what it was. I have never done much with the drama. I think you have to be a full-time dramatist. I also think it is very difficult for a novelist to be a good writer of plays. By the way, I wouldn't want to write scripts for television. They're not literature, and I avoid everything that is fluff.

INTERVIEWER: You are not placing drama in the category of fluff, are you?

STUART: I'm not. What would William Shakespeare do?

INTERVIEWER: One has to keep in mind that Shakespeare's plays are good poems—good poetry. He wasn't necessarily doing two different things. Rather he was writing good poems into plays.

STUART: A playwright whom I like very much is John Millington Synge. I like "Playboy of the Western World" as well as any drama I ever read. I also like "Riders to the Sea." I like Yeats. I like James Joyce—particularly *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* I read Joyce till he got beyond me. When an author gets to the point that I can't understand him, I leave that author.

INTERVIEWER: That was likely because of Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique—his innovations in language.

STUART: I think you should be able to understand stream-of-consciousness. Tom Wolfe used it, and he is excellent.

INTERVIEWER: I understand that the current Joycean rage continues to be about *Ulysses.*

STUART: I started *Ulysses,* but I didn't finish it. Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* is another book that I didn't finish. I enjoyed the movie. I could see it two or three more times.

INTERVIEWER: Let's change the subject—again. Why are so many people writing about sex?

STUART: You know, I was asked that over in Korea. They asked, "Mr. Stuart, why are sex and murder the two greatest subjects American writers have?" I thought for a moment— because the Koreans have a good sense of humor. I replied, "You in Korea are a very old country. You were a civilized country when America was in forest—when the Indians roamed, hunted, and killed each other. We called them savages back then." And I continued, "America is a young country—a new country. Americans don't know very much about sex, so they have books written—one to half a dozen each year—explaining sex to them." Everybody stopped. They just sat there. After a while, they exploded. Murder though—that's something else.

INTERVIEWER: Murder—is it that we are brutal because we are still a frontier people? That we haven't gotten far from the frontier? Do you know the work of Robert Graves?

STUART: Oh, I know Graves personally.

INTERVIEWER: Then you likely know that in a recent interview for *Playboy* he is singing the same old song. He says that we are all oversexed, and that we have brutalized sexuality almost to the point of making ourselves inhuman.

STUART: Well, I think he is right. America is a country of extremes. We go far to the left and then we swing back to the right. We can never seem to get a balance—an even keel. Sex is a beautiful thing. It's creation of lives, and in that is great beauty. But we have brutalized it. I agree with Graves. I agree with such people as John Steinbeck too. He has handled the subject well in some of his work. He was a great writer. And Fitzgerald. His reputation will grow.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you say that?

STUART: It's as though America hasn't had a great and profound literature, and I don't think we have. Greece is the country that has given most thought to the world. Our arguments about this seem to focus on the Hebrews and the Greeks. I settle for the Greeks. Our whole Western civilization started at the rock in Athens. It started with such men as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. There is where the dream began. That's where it started. I study the Greeks.

INTERVIEWER: I see that you have Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Politics*.

STUART: That's right. I have found that I have written the body. A poem to me is a body. Aristotle got it from his father, who was a doctor of medicine.

INTERVIEWER: Every poem has its own form?

STUART: Definitely.

INTERVIEWER: And every story has its own form?

STUART: It is its form. That is what I am saying. I heard a minister once, and he was one of the best I ever heard. In his sermon he said that religion was a lot of horse sense. Being a writer in a world that is rapidly trying to disintegrate is also a lot of horse sense. Why can't people wake up to what is within them? It's within—within you and me. I've told my students that ever since I began teaching.

INTERVIEWER: So the potential law . . .

STUART: I got it from the Bible.

INTERVIEWER: The Kingdom of God is within you?

STUART: That's where I got it. I've read it—memorized the books of the Bible. When I found the account of the valley of dry bones I found poetry. I used to think I couldn't write, and I would become anxious. Then I would read the valley of dry bones to calm myself down.

INTERVIEWER: Why the valley of dry bones?

STUART: I don't know. It just appealed to me, and it is great writing.

INTERVIEWER: The Bible has had a profound influence on your development as a person and as a writer, but you have just said that it also makes good sense.

STUART: It's a good guide, and it is good reading. Faulkner studied it. O. Henry did. So did Edgar J. O'Brien, the great short story writer.

INTERVIEWER: Most great writers have apparently been highly influenced by it.

STUART: Those ancients had something to say, and they knew how to say it. They knew how to create great characters and great situations, and that is, in the final analysis, what literature is all about.

JESSE STUART

SYNTHETIC HEROES

When I look on these cheap synthetic heroes
These little self-importants of our time,
These do-do Birdland Birds, self-styled heroes,
These high-paid heroes in America's news,
I turn to memories of saner days
Of what was once a more substantial time,
Solid American cultural scene,
With these synthetics guiding us what will
America be in our continuing?
In Years to come many will never know.
But to our American youth we'd better throw
The challenge high to guard against synthetics,
America, in weakness, so pathetic,
Soft ending to what once was strength and now,
It's degregation in this future hour.

JESSE STUART

IN DEFENSE OF REGIONALISM

Regionalism is a term I have read constantly in reviews of my books since 1934 until the present, 1973. I have become more than familiar with this term as it has been applied to American authors and their books, especially as it has been applied to me and to my several books. I am so familiar with this term I have memorized every shade of meaning given by the large and small and different dictionaries. Also, I have so studied this meaning, since it has been applied to me, and not to others who have written of regions same as I, that I have memorized mental syllogisms of its various and varied meanings; also, I have memories of its shades and shadows of meaning.

Critics, supposedly critics, many of whom are failures at writing, having tried hard but not succeeding, who have put themselves into positions of reviewing books to tell the authors what was wrong with their books and how they should have been written, so very often have used the term regionalism in such a derogative way as to belittle the author, causing a reading public to dismiss his books as being mere nonsense-catalogues of a region . . . . books that can never rise. I know such criticism has been applied to my books and to me. And even some of these critics have questions why a man "who can write as well as Jesse Stuart will waste his talents on a region." This is a quote.

Then, I have had reviewers of my books speak of me in glowing terms as "America's first rate regionalist." I have also been called America's "second rate regionalist." Then, there was an eastern critic, who has left this earthly literary scene and gone to his literary reward, who once referred to me, in his no-book on criticism, as a third-rate regionalist. In this same book he referred to the Fugitives of Vanderbilt University as second-rate regionalists. If I remember his book correctly, he didn't refer to any first-rate regionalists; if he did I don't recall, for his imposing sentimental views regarding regionalists and literary purity were not welcomed by the thousands of books that fill shelves in six rooms of our home and an outside writing den with three rooms where in each there are books on shelves. I wish now I had kept this book for posterity. If I have kept this one, I cannot find it. But, criticism of its type, be what it may, this self-styled critic had a following in America. He had a few people who read him and believed. He had followers who believed what the man said about me, how he detested me as much, if not more, than any writer in America. He implied that my work stupified his mind and nauseated his stomach, that I was a non-purist and such a little fenced-in regionalist that I and my work should be dismissed from the American literary scene. And, following his criticism, for a period of time, I was dismissed. All anyone has to do, should one be interested enough (God pity his or her patience and perseverence if one did), is to go through 187

scrapbooks of mine to see how accurate I am.

And I must deviate and say here, as a man, I had to have the will of a hungry lion to stay with the writing game, to fulfill my plans formulated when I was a graduate student at Vanderbilt University. I had planned then what I wanted to do. I had hopes then and now that I may, in my lifetime, fulfill these dreams. But to endure the belittling criticism, regarding my being a regionalist who wrote of a small region, and a writer who should be dismissed, I had to have courage, perseverence, and to believe in my dream to endure. Time and the critics comments now recorded in books, magazines, and papers will bear me out on this.

Of course there were a handful of eminent critics from the very beginning, who admitted I was a regionalist, but said my themes were national and universal, and these few predicted that I was a writer of integrity and vision, and one who might weather the storm from a young man to old age as a writer. One of these was Dr. Canby, co-founder of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. There were others, too, including my great teacher and friend, Donald Davidson of Vanderbilt University who wrote of regionalism in glowing terms, predicting there would always be a North and a South in the United States and he had faint hopes that the twain would never meet completely. It was in his class that my future, if I were ever to be a writer, was solved. He told me to go back to my region and write of it as Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, James G. Barrie, all great regionalist writers with national and universal themes had written of Scotland.

Then he referred me to Ireland, one of the three smallest countries in the world with a national literature, the other two being Scotland and Denmark. Almost all of the creativity from the great writers of these small countries is and has been regionalistic. It almost has to be. Speaking of Ireland, Donald Davidson referred me to "A. E." or George Russell, William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, and James Joyce. These writers, what they had written—books, stories, poems, and plays which I had read and loved, were positive proof that I should take Donald Davidson's advice after I had shown him creativity I had done of my area, poetry and prose, and creativity I had done in general prose and poetry, which was very imitative of Carl Sandburg, a well-known and established writer in my high school and college days, one whose creativity appealed to me and other high school and college youth of my day and time. He was my 1920's and early 1930's hero.

So I had the greatest of encouragement to be a regionalist writer where there was more material than I could ever write and where there was material I knew well. I had heard said by a high school English teacher, Mrs. R. E. Hatton, we could write best about the things we knew best. This was logical and made sense to me. But in my college years, and I read book reviews in magazines and newspapers, I cannot recall the word regionalsim in connection with a book and its author as being overused or used in a derogatory sense. In the discussions of books, by the great writers of Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, I never heard of their authors being discussed as regionalists or their books being regionalistic books.

Now let me qualify myself here before I go farther into this subject, I will be the first to say I am a regional writer. It isn't something for me to

admit. It is something I am proud to say. And I will have more to say about this. One thing is, through regionalism as a base, have come the world's greatest writers. What I am speaking of here is how the term has been used by American critics to hurt, to embarrass, and to belittle American writers who have written of a region. The implication is no good, that greatness cannot come from regionalism and I am here to prove that it can, for it has. Later I will cite my examples. The point is, here, the failures of people trying to write in America; after their failures they have set themselves up as critics and book reviewers. And, regionalism, has been made a derogatory term . . . . actually, anymore, a derogatory cliche. While speaking here, I will refer to another term. We used to call books for young people, juvenile books. This term isn't used anymore. Too many of us know about juvenile delinquency and all publishers for young people anymore refer to these books as "books for young people," or "junior books," and not "juvenile books."

Now let us discuss the land area and the people I chose for my regionalistic writing. I chose a region known as Appalachia. Appalachia was, until the word was abused, one of the prettiest words in the English language. Now, connotations hang onto this beautiful word like leeches used to hang onto our naked bodies when we Plum Grove boys slipped in and swam in Jad Reeves' big pond. When Dr. Mary Washington Clarke wrote a book about me, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, a book which eventually was titled *Jesse Stuart's Kentucky*, it might be of interest to you, that it was some little time before the decision was reached, whether to title her book, *Jesse Stuart's Appalachia* or *Jesse Stuart's Kentucky*. Appalachia was a larger region but there were so many derogatory connotations implied to Appalachia that the final verdict, even if it did mean a region smaller in scope, was to use the beautiful Indian name, Kentucky. Called it was, a decision which publishers, author, and all concerned were in final agreement, *Jesse Stuart's Kentucky*.

But my region, in my estimation, is one of the most important regions in the United States of America. And the United States of America is filled with regions as all writers and competent high-level critics know. And this is one reason it is said the great American novel has not been or will never be written for it has to come from a region. My region, Appalachia, is considered one of the least wealthy regions of America (all regions in America are wealthy compared to other countries and their regions in the world); but the minds of its residents, descendents of the pioneers who helped to build, make, and shape America from its inception to the present, and who perhaps did more fighting for it, are wealthy minds indeed. They are the most colorful people living in America today. They are among the greatest conversationalist story-tellers left not only in America but in the world. They are, nearly every man and woman, oral story-tellers. Thus, there is more material in my Appalachia, which consists of parts of eight states, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Ohio, and all of West Virginia.

Appalachia is larger than England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern and Southern Ireland, with a population of approximately that of London, England. My region has the biggest store-house of materials from

every writing category (even, historical), found in any region in America. It is the only region in America that has a definite culture. My region is big enough, and with materials enough, for five-hundred writers. Five-hundred writers writing for one century couldn't exhaust the writing material. And who are these little critics to dismiss a writer as a little regionalist with a little fence around him who has a country within a country such as Appalachia as related to the United States? Who has tried to put that little fence around the writer? It is the mind, the narrow and petty thinking, of the little uninformed writing-failure critic.

If these so-called critics had vision enough to make, by tests and measurements, a survey of America's best writers of yesterday and today, and a survey of world writers, those with regionalist and non-regionalist bases, there would be some surprise in regard to the high percentage of America's and the world's great writers who have regional bases. In fact, a safe estimate would be 80 per cent.

Three of the five American Nobel Prize winners can be definitely classed as regional writers, while a fourth of these five could qualify. Pearl Sydenstricker Buck, our only woman writer to win a Nobel Prize, definitely had her early writing roots anchored (yes, and later ones too) in the Orient. Her book, *The Good Earth,* winner of the Nobel Prize for her, had its setting in the Orient. William Faulkner's books have come from, according to the author, one county in Mississippi, which he christened Yoknapatawpah. At least, he found among three generations of people his stories and novels from a small region of Mississippi earth. John Steinbeck's many earlier books had a regionalistic background in California. Even Ernest Hemingway, whose books were written on different areas of the world, where man struggled against Nature but Nature always won, had a regionalistic setting in Africa, Spain, Cuba, Greece. His thinking was mid-western or middle-America as President Nixon refers to our Midwest.

Among other undeniably important writers of our time, have been Robert Frost whose region was New England; Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters, great regionalists with the midwest as their background. What about Willa Cather of Nebraska? One of the world's great, perhaps, America's greatest writer, a writer many critics of today would like to dismiss but never can, is Mark Twain. To think of Mark Twain, first one thinks of the Mississippi River and Hannibal, Missouri. In Mark Twain's day and time, our eminent American critics considered Mark Twain that funny little old man who wrote stories for boys and made people laugh. The great American writer of Mark Twain's day and time was William Deane Howells, author of *Silas Lapham,* who was considered the great American realist. Today, critics have had a few different comparisons of these writers, because, TIME, not man, is a writer's greatest critic.

Going back a step farther into America's greatest group of writers, the Concord Group, there is no denying here are men known to the world today and practically all the group were regionalists. What about John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. They were New England to the core. Let us pause briefly here for a few of the great regionalists of England! A. E. Houseman (Shropshire), one of England's greatest novelist

and one who was also a good poet; Thomas Hardy (the Heath Country), another of England's greatest novelists and one of the world's greatest novelists; Charles Dickens (London). Even my Geoffrey Chaucer I like to consider a regionalist. In England each writer, it seems to me, whether he or she be great or small, was attached to time and place and had his or her special territory or region. England has produced great regionalists. England is a country that has the richest literary heritages of any country in the world, those past or present which have been accredited partly to the English language, that has such range and lucidity. What about Jane Austin and the Brontes? My whole paper could be filled with the names of regionalist writers from England, Scotland, Wales, Ulster and Ireland.

To mention a few world regionalists, what about Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, two of Russia's greatest writers and two great world writers. Who can deny each did not have a regional base? And what about Mikhail Sholokhov, a great present-day Russian writer and recipient recently of a Nobel Prize for Literature. Who has not read his great book, *And Quiet Flows The Don?* Very few French writers can be anything else but regionalist writers, regionalist with the language, thought, and the very blood of France. What a people, when it comes to writing. France has more Nobel winners in Literature than any other country. Fourteen French writers have won Nobels, with Great Britain a close second, 13 at last count. French writers ink all they write in French language and French tradition.

As for the majority of Latin writers in the Roman Empire, too many to mention here, most were regionalist. Look at Horace, Virgil, Catullus, Juvenal, to mention a few. What about Greece? In their literature, from Sappho (600 B.C.) to the present, their great writers primarily have regionalistic bases. Greece is a small country with many regions.

Now writing of a certain region is not what has given certain writers of certain countries greatness and world status. To have world status, the writer must have something which appeals to readers in other countries in the world or other peoples in other countries would want no part of this writer. All of this goes back to certain universal symbols that the writers use. This has not been pointed out by our pseudo-critics who fling the term regional at an author and his books, in a derogatory way of dismissal. But the universal symbols, to mention a few, are very simple ones. I have been lucky enough, some not knowingly, to use these symbols.

One symbol is the father, important in America, but beginning with the Near East toward and inclusive of the Orient, the father is a great symbol. My book, *God's Oddling*, about my father who was Appalachia born and bred, his ancestors in Appalachia dating back to 1740, a man who could not read and write, has had almost worldwide distribution. The animal is another universal symbol, and my junior book, *Red Mule*, has been reprinted in countries over the Arab world. *The Beatinest Boy*, has a grandmother and grandson for subjects, universal symbols the world over, especially when the grandmother tries to rear her grandson. This book covered India. Then there is a book where people tried to improve themselves and this is a universal idea now; and this book is *The Thread That Runs So True*, which has been published in all the Arab countries of Africa and the Near East. It has been published in the French

speaking countries of Africa. This book is now published by *Reader's Digest* as one of the "Great Biographies of the World." So it has, indeed, universal appeal. My poetry has been published in Japan and there is a rumor that *Man With a Buil-Tongue Plow* was pirated and published in Japan prior to World War II. Now all of these books are written by a regionalist came from a region . . . . . my region. And these books are not all.

My books have been reprinted in Germany, Great Britain, Scandinavian countries. Next to America, I am published more in Denmark. But I have had short stories published in all the countries of Europe, translated into their native languages, reprinted in their textbooks, except, Andorra, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece. I have had books published in France, Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Czechoslovakia. I have had books published in the French and Arab speaking countries of Africa and the Near East—a total of about 18 countries. I have had books published in East Pakistan and India. I've had stories and poems published in West Pakistan, Formosa, the Philippines, Japan, and Korea. My stories are used in Korean college textbooks. They are used in Formosa's textbooks. My stories and books have been published in New Zealand and Australia. I have been published in all the South American countries where Spanish is spoken and written. Remember *Taps for Private Tussie,* my novel, has a universal symbol, where people want everything given to them and they don't want to work for it. There might be one author from southern United States published worldwide more than I have been, and this could be William Faulkner. Very few poets, short story writers, and novelists from America have been published more worldwide than I have been. Yet, these authors have not been listed in American reviews as regionalists. Here is a literary enigma I wish could be explained.

In my later years as an author in America, I have had some competent critics who have believed in me and who have come to my aid. First, was the great bibliographer, Dr. Hensley Woodbridge, now at the University of Southern Illinois, who has done a bibliography of my work. He has kept this up to date, thus helping to pave the way for books by literary critics and teachers. Here are four who have published books: Dr. Everetta Blair, *Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works,* University of South Carolina Press; *The Dark Hills of Jesse Stuart,* Harvest Press, by Lee Pennington, is the only one to explore just one phase of my writing; Dr. Mary Washington Clarke, *Jesse Stuart's Kentucky,* McGraw-Hill Book Company; Dr. Ruel Foster's *Jesse Stuart* and there are five more books, I know about, either made or in the making. These authors are as different as can be, but one agreed dissention they have with other critics is that I am no more regionalist than Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Sandburg, Masters, Frost. Now Frost and Masters are American writers with great reputations but they do not have world extension and this surprises me. They are little known in Africa, the Mideast, or the Orient.

In every country where I have visited the best-known American author is Mark Twain. He is universal. British and French authors have greater extension than American authors. Perhaps it could be two factors, universal subjects used and their geographical locations. Yes, it is nice to

have a book, *The Thread That Runs So True*, listed as one of the *Great Biographies of the World*, and *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* listed as one of 100 best books in America and one of 1000 best books in the world. It is nice to have two more books, *God's Oddling*, the life of my father and *The Thread That Runs So True* world respected and well known. It is great to have a novel, *Taps for Private Tussie*, published on four continents and around the world.

One of my last three books, *Come Gentle Spring*, published May 1969, was reviewed as a regional book except in the *New York Times* (there the reviewer disputed this) and it was selected by booksellers as one of 250 books published over the last four years (approximately 30,000 books each year are published in this country), for The White House Library. *To Teach, To Love*, February 1970, with its coverage, of education around the world, from the Plum Grove rural one-room school to American University in Cairo, Egypt, for the State Department, was still reviewed as a regional book.

Old Ben, a junior book about a pet blacksnake for kiddies from eight to 12, published February 1970, was reviewed as a little regional book. But I have fooled some critics on this one. The snake is really a universal subject, especially beginning with Egypt, in all Moslem and in Buddhist countries. But this is not particularly true in Christian countries, due to the snake's being portrayed as an evil fellow in the Garden of Eden. The snake is symbolic of many things, including health, in the Near and Middle East and the Orient. Also this book, *Old Ben*, has just won the highest award in America for junior books, the Lewis Carroll's Alice In Wonderland Award. It will be, along with others, one per year, since 1958, permitted to sit on the shelf with Lewis Carroll's Alice In Wonderland and wear the gold seal of the Cheshire Cat. Will my *Old Ben*, a gentle loving old reptile and Alice in Wonderland's Cheshire Cat get along upon that shelf together? Old Ben is from Appalachia. The Cheshire Cat is from England.

Do authors in America, who are relegated to restricted and unfavorable criticism by incompetent critics or misunderstanding critics or both, have to suffer a lifetime and either foldup or endure; do they have to wait for that great critic Time to come and render his verdict? Very few have time enough to wait for Time before that grim or friendly reaper comes to harvest his reward. But isn't it a most fortunate thing for an author to live, despite all his near escapes from death, to live long enough to see some strange handwritings on the wall in his favor. Then where will all those petty would-be critics be who wrote about the little regional fences that fenced him in.

If the bigger critics, the all-seeing ones, the far-seeing ones, would rise up and give the proper definition to regionalism, subtracting these derogatory innuendos that hurt this word when used in a literary sense, giving names of the great world authors who were and are definitely regionalists, to prove the value of this term, it would be great for authors who are now deceased, and writers now living, and young writers to come.